be feared. the village may stand on the level of the fields, barely visible, though always very compact. 361 133

A village may be situated anywhere. There is always water near, the soil and the contour of the land scarcely vary, so that the geographer cannot lay down hard and fast rules in explanation. History might have something to say on the subject, but who will ever know the past of those four thousand villages scattered far and wide along the Nile Valley? Their congestion, however, can be explained.

Not a square inch of ground must be wasted, especially if it is rich and well watered. In order to keep the cultivated area as large as possible, the unproductive space covered by human dwellings is reduced to a minimum. As we have seen, up to the nineteenth century the land and its cultivators belonged to the State and a few big landowners. The fellaheen had no interest in living on isolated farmsteads, all the more so because in that troubled period plundering Arabs or highway robbers would soon have despoiled them. 311 361 423 [721 685]

Moreover the village was the official unit for taxes, recruiting, judicial enquiries and the survey, so that it was essential for the villagers to remain within it. For these reasons, which still hold good today, the Government would not allow them to settle outside the village area. 621 651 656

These motives are now reinforced by certain new factors, such as the increase of population, the high price of land, and lack of space. The 1907 survey fixed the boundaries of the village areas once and for all. 361 161

A village may contain anything from a few hundred to several thousand inhabitants — 15,000 is not an uncommon figure — but it will always seem no more than one large family. Nothing is more like one Egyptian village than another Egyptian village. Here is another example of the monotonous uniformity which we have so often had cause to mention. There is a difference between the villages of Upper and Lower Egypt, as there is between the fellaheen of the two regions, but the likeness between them is far more striking. If an Egyptian of the older generation is shown photographs of several villages and asked whether they belong to Upper Egypt or the Delta, he will frequently give the wrong answer. 361

This is because the same kind of people and the same manner of life make for the same sort of villages. When